

WHAT DO THE TWO READINGS MEAN?

Blood pressure is measured in "millimetres of mercury" (mm Hg) and is written as two numbers

140

The first is your systolic blood pressure. It is the highest level your blood pressure reaches when your heart beats

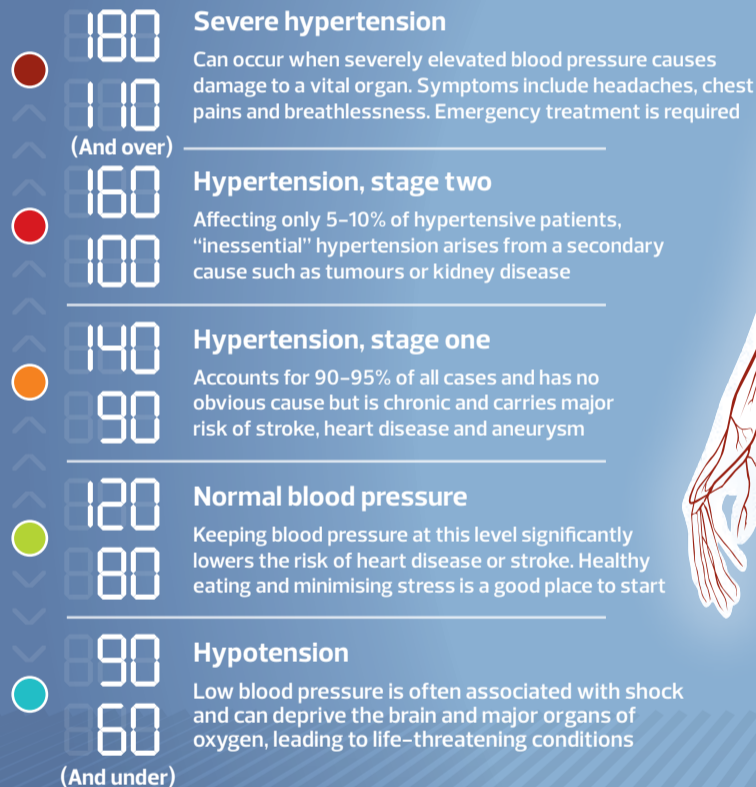
90

The second is your diastolic blood pressure – the lowest it reaches as your heart relaxes between beats



HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE HYPERTENSION?

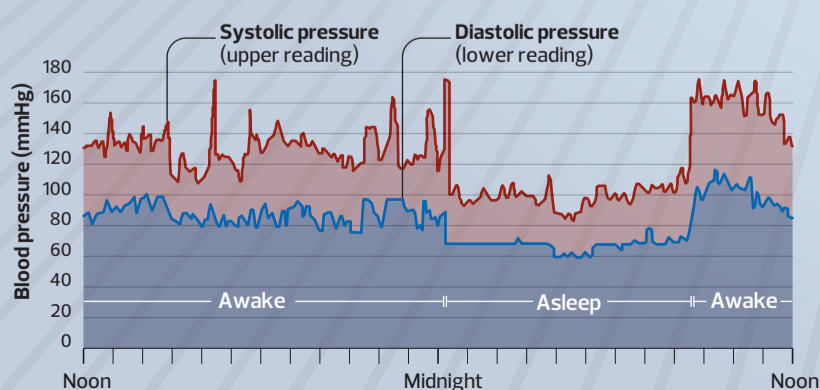
High blood pressure usually has no signs or symptoms, so the only way to find out is to have your blood pressure measured. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence defines normal adult blood pressure as 120/80mm Hg



IF IT HAS NO SYMPTOMS WHY WORRY?

The higher your blood pressure, the greater your risk of stroke and coronary vascular disease. For example, someone with a blood pressure level of 135/85 is twice as likely to have a heart attack or stroke as someone with a reading of 115/75. Currently, 60% of Britons over 40 fall into the higher risk category

HEALTHY BLOOD PRESSURE THROUGHOUT 24 HOURS



WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

1 BRAIN

Hypertension accounts for 60% of all strokes in the UK and is also associated with impaired cognition. Signs of neurological dysfunction due to hypertension may include severe headaches, nausea and vomiting

2 RETINA

Sustained hypertension can damage the retina by narrowing the blood vessels in the eye and, later, causing aneurysms and haemorrhages. Symptoms can include decreased vision and headaches

4 ARTERIES

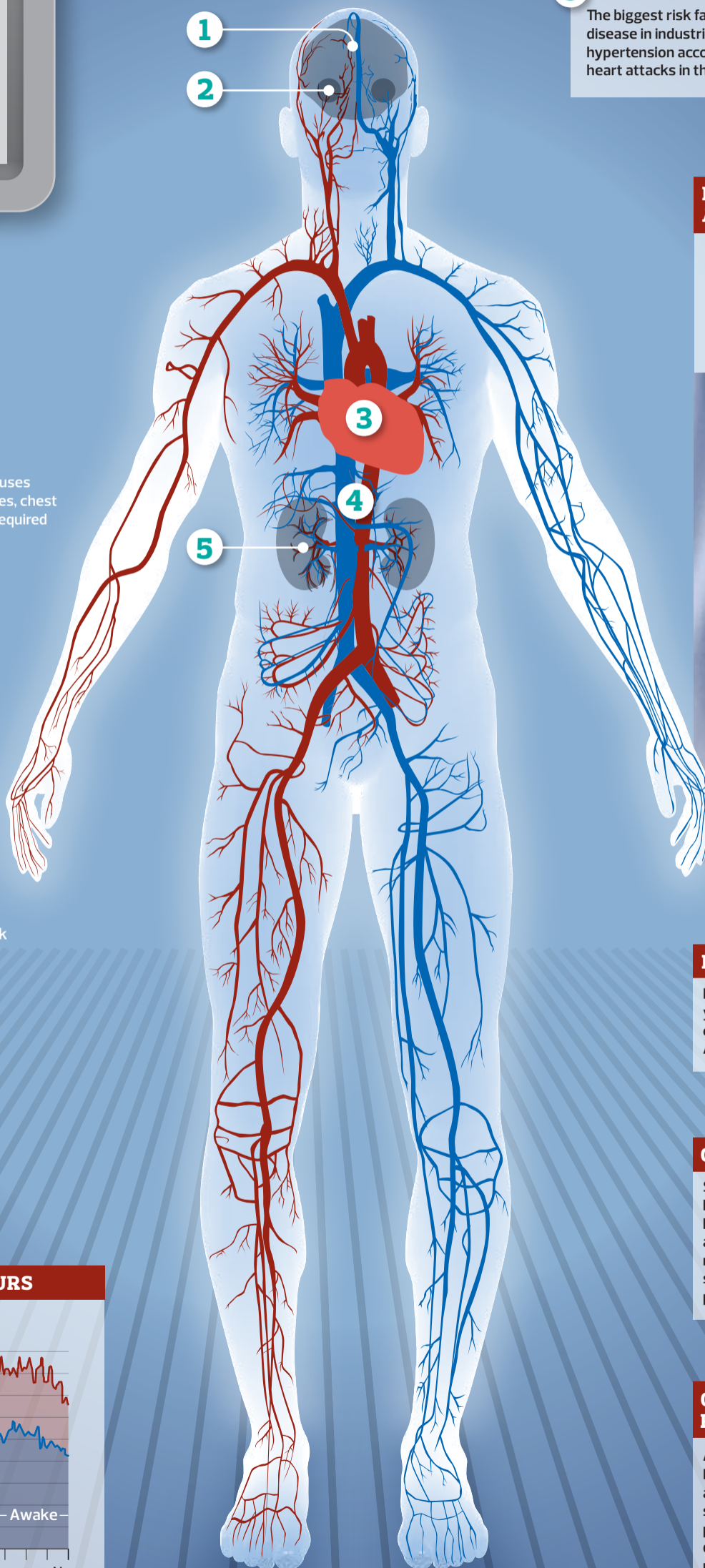
High blood pressure can lead to hardening and obstruction of arteries outside the heart or brain and cause chronic ischemia (lack of blood supply), resulting in pain and, more severely, tissue loss

3 HEART

The biggest risk factor for cardiovascular disease in industrialised countries, hypertension accounts for a half of all heart attacks in the UK

5 KIDNEYS

The kidneys play a role in regulating blood pressure. However, hypertension increases the risk of renal injury and chronic kidney disease



DOES HAVING A TEST CAUSE ANXIETY AND SKEW RESULTS?

Indeed. "White coat syndrome" is a phenomenon in which patients exhibit elevated blood pressure in a clinical setting but not at home. To obtain a more accurate reading, experts recommend that blood pressure should ideally be taken at home twice daily, once in the morning and once in the evening, with follow-up readings over several days



IS AGE A FACTOR?

In the west blood pressure tends to rise with age, hence the saying that your blood pressure should be 100 plus your age. In fact, 120/80 is now considered optimal whatever your age, and the Blood Pressure Association argues that ideally everyone should aim for a bp of 110/70

CAN ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES HELP?

Studies on meditation and relaxation techniques have recorded falls in blood pressure. However, when blood pressure was measured over 24 hours, there was no overall fall. The results of trials involving acupuncture are similarly inconclusive. Although some patients recorded average falls of 5mm Hg systolic and 3mm Hg diastolic after a six-week course of acupuncture, after three months their blood pressure returned to previous levels

ONE OF MY PARENTS HAS HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE: DOES THAT PUT ME AT RISK?

Approximately 30% of cases are attributable to genetic factors. Individuals who have one or two parents with hypertension are twice as likely to suffer from hypertension as the general population. Some studies have also found a higher prevalence of hypertension among people of African American, African-Caribbean, and south Asian descent, though some scientists suggest that culture and environment may be at least as important as ethnicity